

BOOK REVIEW

Common Malayan Plants—(*Selected Drawings with notes*) by H. B. Gilliland, Professor of Botany, University of Malaya. Published by the University of Malaya Press, Singapore 1958—228 pages and 222 line drawings. (Price M\$5).

This handy pocket-size volume consists of line drawings of common Malayan plants most of which are selected from a war-time publication in Japanese by Professor Watanabe of the Chiba University entitled "Illustrations of Useful Plants of the Southern Regions". It is more or less an abridged edition of the Japanese book with short notes in English, while a few new drawings, prepared by 'Che Juraimi bin Samsuri, artist at the Botanic Gardens, Singapore, have been added. The paper is good, of much better quality than that of the original book, and the general set-up of the type is clear. There is an attractive cover.

The purpose of the book is to interest younger students in the plants which grow around them. The pictures should inspire them with a genuine and spontaneous interest in a far better way than text books with difficult words and scientific terms can ever do. Thus drudgery, boredom and tears are avoided and their early interests are not frustrated but fostered. The book ought also to be of some interest to the tourist passing through Malaya, who inevitably sees some strange fruit in the market and wishes to know more about it. Teachers repeatedly visit the Botanic Gardens and ask for simple publications on plants for school lessons. There is a shortage of such and it is hoped that the present one may meet their needs. The choice of plants for illustration is a good basic representation of what is commonly met with round villages and is more likely to interest the layman than a selection of the rare ones or those from the remote jungles.

If the book falls short of anything at all, then perhaps it might be criticized a little by Malay speaking students on the author's choice of Malay names. He has not always selected the commonest Malay name. His choice is often with emphasis on names used in the north. For example, he calls the well-known *bunga tanjong*, *Mimusops elengi*, *mengkula*. *Sesbania grandiflora* is *getih*, but it is far better known as *turi* in Singapore and Johore, the leaves being used as a vegetable. *Paku laut* or *paku hadji* would have been better for *Cycas rumphii* than *bogak hutan* which is probably seldom used. *Saga* is sufficient for *Adenanthera pavonina* without

the epithets *daun tumpul* and likewise *Durio zibethinus* is simply called *durian* and not *durian kampong*. Finally the three species of *Ocimum* namely *basilicum*, *sanctum* and *canum* are often confused on account of their similarity. The name *selaseh* is more correctly applied to *O. sanctum*, the sacred *tulasi* of the Hindus and not to *O. basilicum* which is *selaseh hitam* or *jantan*.

There has been more uniformity and standardization recently in the use of botanical names of plants and most of Professor Gilliland's names are correct and up-to-date according to the rules of botanical nomenclature. The following are the exceptions noted:—*Rhizophora conjugata* should now be *R. apiculata* while *Bruguiera conjugata* becomes *B. gymnorrhiza*. The better known name *Scaevola frutescens* ought now to be changed to *S. sericea* and *Bouea macrophylla* to *B. gandaria*. *Neptunia oleracea* is older than *N. prostrata* while *Lagerstroemia speciosa* takes precedence over *L. flos-reginae*.

The book is almost free from misprints. On page 25 there is *Averrhoa calambola* for *carambola* but here the sound is not really very different and anyway neither the Chinese nor certain English people ever lay much stress on the letter *r*. *Adenostemma lavenia* (*lavenia* a classical Ceylonese name) is misspelt *laevinia*.

The notes accompanying each plate are short but very interesting and there is often information which trained botanists would do well to read. The author states that the flowers of *Dillenia indica* and *Momordica cochinchinensis* are yellow. This is not quite correct as the petals of the former are white but the stamens are yellow. The petals of the latter are white or cream or white with a yellow tinge. Not-with-standing these slight defects the book is quite useful and we hope to see more of its kind at some future date.

J. SINCLAIR.